



## FACT SHEET

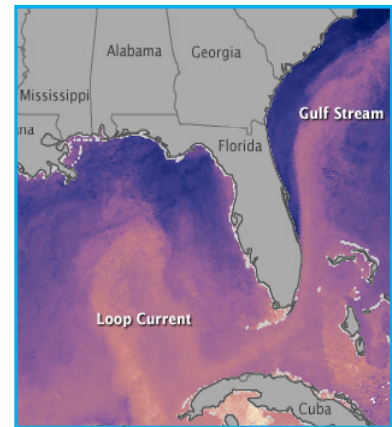
## BP OIL SPILL

This fact sheet provides general information to the public about exposure to air, water, fish and seafood that may be at risk for contamination by crude oil spilling into the Gulf of Mexico.

**Am I at risk?**

On April 20, 2010, an explosion occurred on the Deepwater Horizon oil drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico. The drilling platform is owned by Transocean and is under contract to British Petroleum (BP). Millions of gallons of crude oil have leaked into the northern Gulf since the platform sank two days later.

None of the oil has reached coastal Georgia; however, if current private and government efforts to stop the leak and/or abate contamination of Gulf waters prove unsuccessful, oil could drift into the strong Loop Current and possibly affect Coastal Georgia. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is the nation's leading scientific resource for oil spills, and they are participating on a flow rate task force to inform the public about the location and dispersion of the oil spill. Daily updates about the spill can be found at [www.noaa.gov](http://www.noaa.gov), and you may call (866) 448-5816 for general information.



Source: [nasa.gov](http://nasa.gov)

**Am I currently being exposed to contaminants from the oil spill?**

The Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH) is constantly evaluating the latest reports about the spill, and evaluating predictions of oil movement, weather patterns and projected landfall points. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Coastal Resources Division and DCH's Coastal Health District currently direct a beach monitoring program on the Georgia coast for bacterial contamination. If Georgia's coastal waters and beaches become contaminated with oil from the spill in the Gulf of Mexico, DCH and DNR will assist federal agencies and other authorities with informing the public about beach closures, and swimming, boating, and/or fishing advisories.

Seafood currently harvested in Georgia is safe and has not been affected by the oil spill in the Gulf. NOAA is restricting commercial and recreational fishing in federal waters from Louisiana to Pensacola Bay, while all species harvested from the Georgia coast are safe to eat. DNR's Coastal Resources Division is taking the lead for any necessary closures of commercial shrimping and fishing from Georgia waters. The Georgia Department of Agriculture will be tracking commercial fish and seafood available in grocery stores and for sale in restaurants. The DCH Chemical Hazards Program will be providing guidance to individuals who fish, shrimp and oyster harvest for personal consumption.

**What health effects are associated with oil exposure?**

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency is collecting and analyzing air and water samples to assist states and agencies in understanding and interpreting the immediate and long-term effects of oil contamination in the Gulf. So far, no oil from the spill has had an impact upon Georgia.

Oil exposure can occur through skin contact, inhalation of contaminated air or soil and ingestion of contaminated water or food. Exposure varies from location, types of activities, age, diet, use of protective

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equipment and other factors. Oil touching the skin can cause irritation. Inhaling oil vapors, droplets and soil dust can cause eye, nose and throat irritation, headaches, coughing and breathing problems. Small amounts of oil ingested in water and food can cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and stomach cramps.

State and federal agencies are working together to answer questions about how the oil spill and burning oil may affect air quality. The maps and charts at [www.gulfcoast.airnowtech.org](http://www.gulfcoast.airnowtech.org) show current Air Quality Index values at monitors located along the Gulf coast. Petroleum odors are often pungent, but fumes usually do not present an immediate health risk. The smell is similar to fumes at a gas station, which come from "Volatile Organic Compounds" in the oil, and can be smelled at levels far below what makes individuals ill. Recommended precautions against inhalation exposure include staying indoors, ventilating the home with air conditioning and avoiding strenuous outdoor activity. Symptoms usually disappear when people remove themselves from the source of the odor.

Sensitive populations and those with pre-existing health conditions are advised to seek medical attention if they experience any symptoms. Sensitivities depend on the route of exposure and health condition (e.g., inhalation exposure poses more risk for those with respiratory conditions). Children's exposures may include ingestion of contaminated soil or sand. Newborns are especially vulnerable due to incompletely-formed immune systems.



## Is it safe to eat fish and seafood from the Georgia coast?

At this time, the public should not be concerned about the safety of fish and seafood from Coastal Georgia. In addition to air and water monitoring, fish and seafood are regularly sampled for contamination by state and federal agencies. Crude oil has the potential to taint seafood with a wide range of flavors, odors, and mouthfeels such as fuel, tar, sulphur, solvent, tobacco-like or burnt plastic. Most consumers would be able to see and smell it in any locally purchased or caught fish and seafood prior to consumption, even in very small amounts. Human detection by smell, taste, and texture occurs at extremely low levels—far below levels that would be harmful if consumed. If and when any petroleum contaminants reach Georgia, DCH and other agencies will inform the public about any health risks.



## What about recreation?

It is safe to swim, fish and participate in recreational boating in Coastal Georgia. However, if a body of water is deemed unsafe or unusable by state officials, advisories will be posted near affected bodies of water. If advisories are posted, all individuals should avoid the area and any contact with the water.



## For more information

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH  
Chemical Hazards Program  
Environmental Health Branch  
Atlanta, GA  
404-657-6534

BP ENVIRONMENTAL HOTLINE AND VOLUNTEER  
INFORMATION  
866-448-5816

REPORT OIL  
800-424-8802

WILDLIFE DISTRESS HOTLINE  
866-557-1401

SERVICES OR VESSELS OF OPPORTUNITY  
AND TECH SUGGESTIONS  
281-366-5511

### ONLINE INFORMATION RESOURCES

[www.epa.gov/bpspill](http://www.epa.gov/bpspill)  
[www.deepwaterhorizonresponse.com](http://www.deepwaterhorizonresponse.com)  
[www.bp.com](http://www.bp.com)  
[www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)